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ABSTRACT

This booklet contains a collection of writings by students of Alternative Junior/Senior High School in Fairport, New York, who share their thoughts about the world and the society of which they are a part. Their comments include thoughts on being at risk in the educational system; living poor; music styles that they like; what they see as relevant in the world today; views on violence, crime, and drugs; and the problem of racism. (GLR)

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LET ME TELL YOU

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The New York State Literary Center,
Alternative Junior / Senior High School and
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LET ME TELL YOU

Alternative Junior / Senior High School
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EDUCATION AND CULTURE PROJECT
The New York State Literary Center,
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Young Audiences Rochester
1994

LET ME TELL YOU is a space for the thoughts of young adults in a world which too often excludes them. I invited the students of Alternative Junior / Senior High School, through the written expression of their ideas, to enter into a dialogue with the society of which they are expected to become a part.

For my work with the students this year, I compiled a sampling of readings for discussion. My range was wide; my underlying theme was young people and coming of age. The sampling included Michelle Ingrassia's "Growing Up Fast and Frightened" in *Newsweek*; J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher In The Rye*; Barry Walters' "Grief and Transcendence in Today's Pop" in *The Village Voice*; Neil Howe's and Bill Straus' *13th Gen.*; Greg Tate's "Above and Beyond Rap's Decibels" in *The New York Times*; Kody Scott's *Monster*; and Jon Katz's "The Media's War on Kids" and "Animated Arguments: Why The Show's Critics Just Don't Get It" both in *Rolling Stone*. Pearl Jam's *Ten* and *Vs.* were also part of my compilation, as was The Constitution of The United States and Nirvana's *Nevermind* and *In Utero*. Discussion also included Snoop Doggy Dogg, the Geto Boys, and the Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy. I asked the students to think and to write.

I began with the support of the administration, faculty, staff, and students who over the past three years have educated me and with the collaboration of Leslie Hunter, Music Therapist and Gayle Bryant, Teacher's Aide. For ten days this year, the music room became our place where ideas could be voiced and tested and could grow and take form into multimedia pieces for the library, into publications like *Kurt Cobain 1967 - 1994*, and into *LET ME TELL YOU*.

Dale Davis

I go to an alternative high school.

My name is Maria. I'm not a superstar or anyone in the spotlight. One thing that brings me happiness is knowing I am my own person. I have no worries about what other people want me to be. I go to school, an alternative high school. Now stop, don't try to judge me or put a label on me. I'm the same. I am as bright as a student who attends a regular high school. I go to an alternative school because I can't concentrate in a large group. When I am in a smaller group, I'm an A student. I didn't have a smooth, easy life. I was in foster homes and places like that. I don't call myself a angel, but I'm not an evil, hopeless cause. I am having success now. I'm taking a cosmetology course, and I go to school. I hope I can become a scientist some day.

I have a lot to say about the alternative high school I attend. Many people seem to be confused about what an alternative school is, so I want to break it down. Some people say we are "at risk." What is "at risk"? At risk for what? I'm not trying to be smart, but I hope what I write will open people's minds. I hope people will open their minds before they open their mouths.

The only thing I believe about today is that people of the world do not want to take responsibility. A t.v. show or a song cannot hold a gun to your head to force you to do something or act a certain way. People need to stop the excuses and cover-ups and face up to all the problems today.

In my seventeen years of life I have learned as you get older life is harder. I have learned the world is a cold place, and the only concern is what you can get for yourself. Money makes the world go round. I have learned you can't trust many people, and you always have to watch your back. You don't have to be paranoid, but you can't be naive today. The world is not all bad. There are nice people, and there are things to see. You just have to be patient and cautious, and you shouldn't wear your heart on your sleeve.

I will leave you with this: Be yourself, stay strong, and have love for others. You will survive.

Maria

Hey, what's up! I'm Cedric. I am a seventeen year old black male. I live in the violent country of America, and in this world I have learned that people are crazy. People kill each other, especially black people.

Cedric

My name is Ivory. I am fifteen. I am ninety percent African American. I have been in many different schools, but for now I am in an alternative high school. I have so many goals to accomplish. My desires and my goals are to be a choreographer, an actor, a singer, a writer, a model, an African American activist. To keep myself motivated, I pick role models. I put inspiring themes on my bedroom wall. To be positive, you have to think positively. I am determined. I know times are going to be hard. I know I have strikes against me. I have come a long way. I want to take further steps.

I know I have strikes against me.

Being a teenager and black in the world today is very hard. You never know what's going to happen. We live in a world of racism, hate, prejudice and other problems. I think we need a better government, and we need to be more willing to change. I think we need to get rid of drugs, and we need to stop hate. Today for me and for others we need more racial pride and more racial identity

Ivory

You can't make it in the world today without money. You can't buy a house, and you can't get food. You just can't live in the world without money. You just can't do it.

Sometimes people give you looks if you are poor.

Bill

My name is J.T. I go to an alternative high school. People think that because I take Ritalin my brain is messed up. Just because I handle things differently and my thoughts might be on another cloud from yours does not mean I'm messed up in the head. To me life is just a game you can't win. Why can't you win? The answer is clear to me, you are not supposed to win because the object is not to win. The object is just to play for fun.

I could never express myself very well through words, that's why I turned to music to show other people how I feel. Other people never really get my ideas though.

When I look at the world today, I see hunger, pain, misery, drugs, and crime.

J.T.

My name is Xavier, and I want to make it in the world. Maybe I can be an actor or a singer. I want to be somebody for my people. When I get older I want to do something that nobody can do but me. This is my one dream.

I have learned that if you want something in this world you have to take the initiative and work to the best of your ability. One other thing I have learned is that I am no different from a grain of sand on the beach.

I want to make it in the world.

Xavier

My name is Sherard. I'm in the tenth grade, and I am a rapper. I come from Hempstead, Long Island. I go to an alternative high school. I'm not a freak. Some people try to put me down and say I can't do things. I don't listen. I think everybody should try their best and try to reach their own goals in life.

I like rap. I admire it. I love it. When I rap, I talk about how to stay away from drugs and crime. My rap idol is Charley Brown of Leaders of The New School.

Sherard

My name is Chris. I am seventeen. Today it is about trying to stay alive. There are too many taxes, and things just cost too much. I still go to school, and I work two jobs, too. I have a daughter to take care of.

This is what I want to tell my daughter.

> *I'm sitting here in music class, and believe it or not I'm writing in music. Usually I am playing a musical instrument. I like music. I like making music.*
>
> *You are only seven months old now, but by the time you read this you are going to be a young female. When you were born, I was seventeen years old and your mother was sixteen. We were young to be parents, but we believed in each other. We wanted to keep you. I would never get rid of my little girl. Everyone told me I was crazy to stay with your mommy and have a child, but I knew inside I could never leave you or your mom.*

Chris

My name is Aaron. I got kicked out of my home school. I was sent here, to an alternative high school. I didn't want to come here. When I first came here, I was a thief. I was stubborn. Now my attitude has changed. I get more respect here. I get more respect at home now, too. When you give respect to people, people respect you back. This school is good. What helps me here is that they cut me slack, and they don't yell at me for everything. I am getting somewhere in life now. If I was still at my home school, who knows where I would be. I probably would have dropped out.

Aaron

My name is Jerry. I got kicked out of my home school. I threatened a teacher because she got me mad. It was a stupid thing to do. Now my goal is to work my way back. Let me tell you, it's not fun.

Let me tell you, it's not fun.

Jerry

My name is Bill. I could care less about being on an Honor Roll. At this school before lunch we have ten minutes of free reading. I have started a book. I have enjoyed reading the book. I am getting toward the end, and I don't like the thought of coming to the end of the book.

My favorite kind of music is heavy metal. My favorite group is Slayer. I think a lot of my attitude comes from the music I listen to. I'm not saying music gives me a bad attitude, just sometimes music goes with the mood.

The most important thing in my life is my family. At this time in my life my family is having a lot of problems. My family puts a lot of pressure on me, and right now I'm trying not to let that bother me too much.

Bill

When I first came to this school, I used to get into fights. I had an attitude about everything. The teachers here believe in me. This school helped me through bad times. People gave me compliments. I know where to turn for anything. This school taught me how to work with other people and to thank people for things.

Henry

Drugs, crime, drugs are everywhere today. I see drugs everywhere. People fight and kill and hurt others for a buck. It is hard trying to make it in this lifetime. I don't believe it will stop no matter how hard people work together. I don't believe drugs and crime will stop. There will always be two things, drugs and crime. Today we have to learn to live with murder, rape, robberies, fights. We have to learn to deal with them. We have to stop turning our heads the other way. We have to face the facts of life.

It is hard trying to make it in this lifetime.

John

Yo! My name is Collice. People call me C-Dog. I have been to hell and back. I have been shot in the leg. I could have died. I have been to every school in Rochester. My mother and I have been through some tragic things. My father died when I was eleven months. My life was going down hill, but I'm in a comfortable school now, an alternative high school, and I'm about to try and turn my life around. My mother works two jobs. I'm still alive. I want to go to college.

The real issue in the world today is not Beavis and Butt-head. The real issues in the world today are crime, guns, us, our community. I know why people are killing each other. People are killing each other because they don't have a future. People live on the streets today, and no one gives a damn about them.

People are killing each other because they don't have a future.

The school I go to now is working out for me. There are some people in this school I don't like, but I don't let those people get me down because if I do I will never have the opportunity to be somebody. Every since I was in third grade I was a follower, but now that I have seen what is going on in the world I strongly believe I can be a leader. It's hard. I have to hang on until the end. I have to keep on pushing myself. I want to graduate and make my family proud, and most important I want to make myself proud. When I get older and have children, I want them to know right from wrong so they won't make the same mistakes I did.

Collice

My name is Andrae. I have a dream. I want racism to stop. I hope in 1995 we will not have any riots. I want to have a child who will grow up not to hate anybody. I don't want to see my child go to jail. I want my child to be somebody.

I think gangsta rap is okay. People say gangsta rap gives teenagers and some young kids bad ideas. I don't think it's the rap. I think the people give themselves the ideas.

Andrae

If the world is too frustrated with what is on television, what does the world want children to see, the real world or television?

Jeff

What really is life? How really should we live our lives? My name is Scott, and I really wish I could answer those questions. Ever since I was eight I have lived a life of hell. Drugs came into the picture when I was fifteen. I've stayed strong and tried to cope, but when I was sixteen it all hit me. The disease is anxiety. I am eighteen. I take tranquilizers. So far they have helped me. Life is frustrating and difficult I know. I've been in jail and on probation. I've been beaten totally helpless by cops. My alternative to this hard part of my life is baseball. I've been playing since I was four. My goal is to play professional baseball. The game of life is quick. You have to get and get out if you are expecting to last.

You have to get and get out if you are expecting to last.

Scott

I was walking to school one day, and I was stopped by a police officer. The police officer asked me where I was going. I said I was going to school. The police officer told me to get in the car. I didn't want to get into the police car. The police officer told me if I didn't get into the car he would have to take me to the police station. I got in the car. I didn't feel like going through any more.

In the world today I see that drugs kill people. One way that drugs kill people is that people steal from other people and people get mad and kill.

I think the world today is bad, and the reason that I write this is because people die young today and there are lots of drugs in the world that are killing people.

Bruce

My name is Steve. I am sixteen, and I go to an alternative high school. I have many goals to accomplish, such as getting off probation and getting a job.

In the world today I think people just don't care.

Steve

There is nothing for kids to do in the world today. Mostly I think kids are bored. The problem is not about Beavis and Butt-head. Beavis and Butt-head are great. I think kids turn to drugs to find an escape from their everyday world.

I've seen my friend's father lose his job, and they were forced to sell their house and move to a part of the city that is pretty bad.

I think kids turn to drugs to find an escape from their everyday world.

Why do cops think I am buying drugs? I have been harassed many times. It's pretty embarrassing to have cop cars surrounding you with their lights flashing. Everyone looks at you when the cops search you. I have been issued three loitering tickets, a ticket for resisting arrest, and a ticket for trespassing. I don't know why I can't walk down the street without a cop jumping down my throat about being in the wrong place.

Bryan

My name is Kris. I want to be a vet when I grow up. I want to board race horses. I want to have a ranch home. Maybe I will have a tiger. Maybe I will have some guard dogs so I will feel safe. I want to feel safe. I know I will never hit my kids. I know I will not do drugs.

Kris

I was attacked in the mall. I was told I could not go into the mall. Because I hang out with certain people who people think look like they may do bad things, people automatically think I do those things.

Right now I am sick of people trying to nitpick about music and television. My younger brother watches Beavis and Butt-head, and he doesn't go out and do what they do. My younger brother knows the difference between right and wrong.

"The best revenge for pain is life." Eddy Vedder hit it right on the spot. I am having a hard time living with the choice Kurt made. Still at the same time, I understand it. All he wanted to be was Kurt Cobain, not Kurt Cobain mega star. People wouldn't let it be that way. They had expectations he tried to live up to, but when he could no longer meet them he felt as if he were letting his fans down. All he was doing was giving me life. Every time he spoke I was listening. He got through to me with his harsh, mangled words, those words that confused so many. So many people thought his lyrics had no meaning, but they did. Oh yes they did, they were full of pain, experience, hate, sorrow, beliefs, and wants. So many times Kurt sang I felt his pain and I could hear his cries, cries for help to find a way to get his pain stricken life together. I could understand his hate. I related to his experiences. I went through his sorrow. I agreed with his beliefs, and I supported his wants. When Kurt took his life, he took part of mine, too. Kurt I will always remember you and your music, and your words will linger within me. Thank you for giving me life. I love you.

Cameron

My favorite music is heavy metal. I like heavy metal because I like the sound of it. I like what heavy metal talks about, like people and how they are dying today. My favorite group is Pantera.
I think Pantera has good talent.

I like to play football and basketball.

Life is a little hard. I've learned the world is hard.

I've learned the world is hard.

Jeff

I don't know why people say music gives you a bad attitude. It's not the music, it's the person.

Ladoris

I like rap because of the bass and the lyrics. I don't think if you listen to rap that you are a criminal. This is like saying that if you listen to rock and roll or heavy metal then you are a druggie.

I think if parents don't want their children to watch t.v., they should talk to their children. People should not blame the t.v. People should blame themselves.

If you don't have money today, you don't have anything. Money is what the world is, money. You have to have money for a good life.

Jason

I am not anybody out there.

Who am I? I am not anybody out there. I want to be somebody for me and for my mother.

Ronnie

I see the world as a place where there's a huge attitude. Money is everything, and if you don't have it you're nothing.

Jeff

Snoop Dogg's music did not cause violence. The sound of Snoop's beats is mellower than other rappers. To me Snoop doesn't rap too much about killing. He raps about the neighborhood, about women, about his family, better known as the Dogg Pound, about the everyday things. Snoop's rap is Snoop's style.

David

My name is Patrick. I am a very polite person. I like to practice different languages. I go to an alternative high school. My favorite music is jazz. I like pop and blues, too. I spend most of my time working at my house. I like to play basketball in my backyard or play football in the street. I am not a perfect person, but who is? I like animals better than humans. At times an animal is my best friend. Right now I am sick of snow and rain. My favorite subjects in school are science and social studies. I like everything that is natural.

Lately I have been thinking about the way drugs go around. I think people should go to church and put their money in church instead of drugs or cigarettes. Most people today are greedy, and that's why I do not care for money. Animals are not greedy. Animals are not wasteful.

Patrick

I think I fit into all ways of life, but I just want to do my own thing and have fun doing it.

Andy

I like live on music. Music is what moves me.

The day Kurt Cobain died I was listening to my stereo. I was taping *Bleach*, Nirvana's first album. I turned on the radio to see what 96 WCFM was playing. A guy came on the radio and said there was a dead body in the Cobain's apartment. I was so worried. Then my friend J.T. called. He said the dead body was Kurt Cobain. At first I didn't believe him. I mean would you believe somebody if they just came out and said your idol was dead? I turned the news channel on t.v. There it was, I saw a guy who has been my idol for about a year just up and killed himself. I was devastated. I went upstairs and changed into all black clothes. I called my girlfriend. I was trying to talk to her with tears in my eyes. She was pretty upset, too. I told my brother Mike. He was really shocked. Since Kurt died, I have gone back to my roots, to blues, rock, and hard rock. What I think Kurt said I will say through my guitar and my lyrics. Kurt lives on in my heart and mind.

Music is what moves me.

Dave

Walking
through the outside air,
the cold spring
is
all
in my hair.
It is dark. It is wet. It is gloomy.
The ground
is wet
and soggy.

It is like
I am dark
and secluded,
not in a violent sense,
in a sad sense.

I like to sleep.
Sometimes
I wish
I would never wake up.
I want to sleep
under water.

My wish
is to be blind
and deaf
so I could never
see or hear
the wrong doing.

Childhood brings memories. I lost my childhood the day I was born. I was always on my own. Haze, daze, that's my known existence. Maybe in some way I was happy as a child, not in the sense of anyone being nice, but in the sense of so much happened. All I remember is a daze. I was so bored I got high on depression.

I was always on my own.

Darkness, sadmadness, every day I cry for fear of living forever. I don't want to

live for horrible years. In my head I hear the sorrow of the dead. I hear the cries. I hear the sadness, and then my ears cry. My ears beg for mercy. Please, please no more sorrow.

I leave you with the pale blue sky with the bright red moon.

Jason